ers from the West were regularly reaching India. When, about the first century B.C. or the first century A.D., they learned to take advantage of the monsoon to make the voyage across the Indian Ocean from the Red Sea, the commerce became extensive and important and was to continue so for many centuries. Few travellers from the Mediterranean world seem to have gone beyond India and Ceylon, however, although the Romans and Greeks heard vaguely of China. In A.D. 120 jugglers, sent with an embassy of one of the states on China's southern border, arrived at Loyang and professed to come from west of the sea, a region which they declared to be the same as Ta Ch'in. In A.D. 166, merchants from Ta Ch'in reached Loyang and claimed to be an embassy from their king—who is supposed to have been the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. Aside from these somewhat dubious instances we do not hear specifically of any representatives of the Mediterranean world penetrating China, although some may have done so. Moreover, we are not sure that Chinese journeyed as far west as the Roman Empire, even though the Chinese historical records of the time give a description of Ta Ch'in which may have been derived from eyewitnesses. The , envoy whom Pan Ch'ao sent—possibly with the hope of opening communication with Ta Ch'in without the intermediation of the Parthians, who, as enemies of the Romans, would not be especially eager to promote direct trade relations between China and Rome—succeeded only, as we have seen, in reaching the Persian Gulf.

The commodities exchanged through this commerce were, naturally, those which combined small bulk and weight with high value.

The chief Chinese export appears to have been silk—in its raw form, as thread, and as cloth. We hear repeatedly of it, and in late years specimens of it in the form in which it was shipped have been found, preserved through centuries by the dry desert air, near the western end of the wall which the Han built to protect the overland routes. Skins, furs, rhubarb, and cinnamon are also said to have been among the merchandise which the Chinese sent westward and which eventually reached the Mediterranean world. The Middle Kingdom received in return glass, jade (although most of that used under the Han was of domestic origin), horses, precious stones (including the diamond), ivory, tortoise